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BIG PICTURE

NSA Buying Americans' Internet Browsing Records Without Warrant + More

The Defender's Big Brother NewsWatch brings you the latest headlines related to governments' abuse of power, including attacks on democracy, civil liberties and use of mass surveillance. The views expressed in the excerpts from other news sources do not necessarily reflect the views of The Defender.

By The Defender Staff

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NSA Is Buying Americans' Internet Browsing Records Without a Warrant

TechCrunch reported:

The U.S. National Security Agency is buying vast amounts of commercially available web browsing data on Americans without a warrant, according to the agency's outgoing director.

NSA director Gen. Paul Nakasone disclosed the practice in a letter to Sen. Ron Wyden, a privacy hawk and senior Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee. Wyden published the letter on Thursday.

Nakasone said the NSA purchases "various types" of information from data brokers "for foreign intelligence, cybersecurity, and authorized mission purposes," and that some of the data may come from devices "used outside — and in certain cases, inside — the United States."

"Web browsing records can reveal sensitive, private information about a person based on where they go on the internet, including visiting websites related to mental health resources, resources for survivors of sexual assault or domestic abuse, or visiting a telehealth provider who focuses on birth control or abortion medication," said Wyden in a statement.

Wyden said he learned of the NSA's domestic internet records collection in March 2021 but was unable to share the information publicly until it was declassified. As a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Wyden is allowed to receive and read classified materials but cannot share them publicly. NSA lifted the restrictions after Wyden put a hold on the nomination of the next NSA director, the senator said.

23andMe Admits Hackers Stole Raw Genotype Data — and That Cyberattack Went Undetected for Months

TechRadar reported:

23andMe has revealed that cybercrackers were targeting customers for months without the company realizing it.

According to an obligatory notification letter sent to California's attorney general, accounts belonging to users of the genetic testing firm were being hacked from about April to September 2023, in a series of brute force attacks.

Millions of people's genetic data was leaked on the dark web by the threat actor, after a total of 14,000 users had their accounts breached, according to 23andMe's filing with the Security and Exchanges Commission (SEC).

23andMe only realized that attacks were taking place in October when the stolen data was being promoted on an unofficial subreddit and on a popular underground forum. However, some data was also leaked on BreachedForums in August, which the company was not aware of at the time.

Victims have filed class action lawsuits against 23andMe in response, although the company did try to change its terms of service to try and prevent such action from being taken against it.

Mass General Fired Nurse Who Refused Booster After Reaction to First Doses, Lawsuit Claims

CBS News reported:

A former registered nurse at Mass General in Boston is suing the hospital for wrongful termination, saying she was fired for refusing a COVID booster despite a request for a medical exemption after an adverse reaction to the first two doses.

Florrie McCarthy of Braintree filed the lawsuit against Mass General Brigham at U.S. District Court in Boston. McCarthy said she worked at the hospital for 36 years. She says in January 2021 after receiving the first dose of the Moderna COVID vaccine, she experienced numbness in her face and tingling around her nose and lips for several hours.

One month later after receiving the second dose of the vaccine, McCarthy said she had a similar reaction along with a metallic taste. According to the lawsuit, McCarthy continues to suffer from a diminished sense of taste and numbness on the right side of her tongue.

McCarthy said she provided a letter from her doctor, and in her request for medical exemption included a letter from Mass General's Department of Neurology saying "We cannot rule out that the COVID-19 vaccine has contributed to some of the patient[']s neurological symptoms." The hospital denied the request, saying it "does not demonstrate a sufficient medical reason or contraindication to support an exemption," the lawsuit says.

Schools Are Using Surveillance Tech to Catch Students Vaping, Snaring Some With Harsh Punishments

Associated Press reported:

Like thousands of other students around the country, Aaliyah Iglesias was caught by surveillance equipment that schools have installed to crack down on electronic cigarettes, often without informing students.

Schools nationwide have invested millions of dollars in the monitoring technology, including federal COVID-19 emergency relief money meant to help schools through the pandemic and aid students' academic recovery. Marketing materials have noted the sensors, at a cost of over $1,000 each, could help fight the virus by checking air quality.

Some districts pair the sensors with surveillance cameras. When activated by a vaping sensor, those cameras can capture every student leaving the bathroom.

A leading provider, HALO Smart Sensors, sells 90% to 95% of its sensors to schools. The sensors don't have cameras or record audio but can detect increases in noise in a school bathroom and send a text alert to school officials, said Rick Cadiz, vice president of sales and marketing for IPVideo, the maker of the HALO sensors.

Facebook and Instagram Accused of Allowing Predators to Share Tips With Each Other About Victimizing Children

FOXBusiness reported:

Meta, which includes Facebook and Instagram, is accused of facilitating and profiting off of the online solicitation, trafficking and sexual abuse of children, according to a complaint filed by the New Mexico Attorney General.

New Mexico AG Raúl Torrez is bringing legal action against Meta, accusing the company of permitting sponsored content to appear alongside inappropriate content in violation of Meta's standards, allowing child predators who use dark web message boards to share tips with each other about victimizing children, and reportedly rejecting its own safety teams' recommendations to make it harder for adults to communicate with children on its platforms, according to an updated complaint reviewed by Fox News Digital.

"Parents deserve to know the full truth about the risks children face when they use Meta's platforms," AG Torrez told Fox News Digital. "For years, Meta employees tried to sound the alarm about how decisions made by Meta executives subjected children to dangerous solicitations and sexual exploitation."

Torrez said the newly unredacted aspects of the complaint help form the basis of their action against Meta and "make clear" that "Mark Zuckerberg called the shots" in making the decisions that mattered to children and parents.

Congress Wants to Ban China's Largest Genomics Firm From Doing Business in the U.S. Here's Why.

NBC News reported:

Bipartisan legislation was introduced in both houses of Congress Thursday that would effectively ban China's largest genomics company from doing business in the U.S., after years of warnings from intelligence officials that Beijing is gathering genetic information about Americans and others in ways that could harm national security.

The bills, backed by leaders of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party and the Senate Homeland Security Committee, target BGI, formerly known as Beijing Genomics Institute, which in 2021 was blacklisted by the Pentagon as a Chinese military company. Five company affiliates also have been sanctioned by the Commerce Department, which accused at least two of them of improperly using genetic information against ethnic minorities in China.

In an exclusive interview with NBC News, Rep. Mike Gallagher, R-Wis., and Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, D-Ill., said their legislation would ban BGI — or any company using its technology — from federal contracts, a move the company said in a statement would "drive BGI from the U.S. market."

"This bill will protect Americans' personal health and genetic information from foreign adversaries who have the ability and motivation to use it to undermine our national security," Peters told NBC News.

First Tech Platform Breaks Ranks to Support Kids Online Safety Bill

Politico reported:

The owner of Snapchat is backing a bill meant to bolster online protections for children on social media, the first company to publicly split from its trade shop days before the company's CEO prepares to testify on Capitol Hill.

A Snap spokesperson told POLITICO about the company's support of Kids Online Safety Act. The popular messaging service's position breaks ranks with its trade group NetChoice, which has opposed KOSA. The bill directs platforms to prevent the recommendation of harmful content to children, like posts on eating disorders or suicide.

Snap's CEO will appear with the heads of Meta, Discord, TikTok, and X, formerly Twitter, in a hearing on Wednesday before the Senate Judiciary Committee, where lawmakers will grill them over their companies' alleged failures to remove content promoting the sexual abuse of children.

None of the other platforms testifying have taken public positions supporting KOSA to date. TikTok and Discord declined to comment on KOSA. X did not respond to a request for comment. Meta didn't answer if it supports KOSA, but said it supports "internet regulation" and issued its own legislative "framework" this month calling on Congress to pass a bill to shift the responsibility to app stores, not platforms, to obtain parental consent for kids to download social media apps.

Italy Fines First City for Privacy Breaches in Use of AI

Reuters reported:

Italy's privacy watchdog has fined the northern city of Trento for breaking data protection rules in the way it used artificial intelligence (AI) in street surveillance projects.

Trento was fined 50,000 euros ($54,225) and told to delete all data gathered in two European Union-funded projects. It is the first local administration in Italy to be sanctioned by the GPDP watchdog over the use of data from AI tools.

The authority — one of the EU's most proactive in assessing AI platform compliance with the bloc's data privacy regime — last year briefly banned popular chatbot ChatGPT in Italy.

In 2021, it also said a facial recognition system tested by the Italian Interior Ministry did not comply with privacy laws.

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